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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3083
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 8224
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0513
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JUN 9481
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 6247
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1825
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6919
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4454

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 002063

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/06/2018
TAGS: PTER PGOV PREL ECON PM EC CO
SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE'S JUNE 2 MEETING WITH
FOREIGN MINISTER OF PANAMA

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer

Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Deputy Secretary Negroponte met with Panamanian Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis Navarro June 2. Both the Deputy and Navarro noted the U.S.-Panama relationship had "never been stronger." Navarro said the GOP lost its last helicopter in an accident, and requested expedited USG assistance to assist in restoring Panamanian air mobility to conduct counter-drug and counter-insurgency operations near the Colombian border. He thought a solution to the Colombian-Ecuadorian conflict was imminent, offered Panamanian assistance in this regard, and said normalization of relations would require both presidents to "de-personalize" the dispute. End summary.

¶2. (U) Participants:

U.S.:

Deputy Secretary John D. Negroponte
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Craig A. Kelly
Kelly Hapka Carrillo, note taker

Panamanian:

Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis Navarro

¶3. (C) Deputy Secretary Negroponte met with Panamanian FM Samuel Lewis Navarro June 2 on the margins of the OAS General Assembly. Navarro assured the Deputy that the expansion of the Panama Canal--a \$5 billion investment--would have no negative environmental effects. Both the Deputy and Navarro noted that the U.S.-Panama relationship had "never been stronger."

¶4. (C) Navarro described the recent helicopter accident in Panama which left the GOP without any operating helicopters. He noted how the balloon effect of successful Colombian counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency operations had pushed the FARC and narco-traffickers over the Panamanian border. The difficult terrain required air mobility to prevent the trafficking of drugs, weapons and FARC activity in the border area. He requested U.S. help in expediting Panama's request to buy U.S. helicopters, noting that the manufacturer is experiencing production delays.

¶ 5. (C) Navarro said Panama wanted to help lower Ecuador-Colombia tensions without taking sides. He said the Panamanians had participated in meetings where the Ecuadorian and Colombian military commanders on the border discussed cooperation. Both commanders "hated the FARC" and appeared open to bilateral military collaboration. He said there was too much political posturing by the presidents on both sides, and to normalize relations the issue needed to be "de-personalized."

¶ 6. (C) Navarro expressed concern that as FARC units started to retreat into neighboring countries due to GOC military operations, the FARC would splinter into autonomous fronts. To combat multiple autonomous fronts, he said, "greater international cooperation would be required." Although Navarro would not agree to publicly condemn countries that gave sanctuary to the FARC, he said Panama would continue involvement in resolving the Colombian-Ecuador dispute. He recommended that to mobilize international support against the FARC, the USG should underscore that the group no longer has ideological foundations, but is simply a group of "narco-traffickingmafiosos."

¶ 7. (U) Cleared by D staff.
BROWNFIELD

=====CABLE ENDS=====